

## RICH OR POOR?

BY MARION HARLAND.

"YOUR papa is not as rich as your Uncle Elbert."

"Why isn't he, mamma?"

"Don't ask absurd questions, Carrie. I wish you children would take your books and games into the dining-room for awhile. My head aches, and I am tired to death. I *should* like to have a nap of ten minutes before it is time to get supper. Your papa will not be in until late, I know."

But when the room was cleared of the talkative flock, Mrs. Lollard did not lie down, or even close her eyes. She leaned forward, resting her elbows upon her knees, her chin in her hands—the ungraceful, but restful attitude over-tired women are prone to adopt when removed from critical observation. "Taking one's comfort," I once heard a much-enduring housewife and mother call it. Mentally, Mrs. Lollard was taking discomfort instead.

It was the evening of New Year's Day. Bleak twilight was barely kept without the windows by the sleepy glow of the anthracite in the grate, which was only half full. Coal was high, and they could not afford to keep up a larger fire, the mother had said, shortly, to Carrie, the eldest daughter, when she would have replenished the sinking heap.

"It is so dark in here, mamma. It is enough to give one the blues," the girl had remonstrated. "We can't see to read, or talk either, for that matter. Mayn't I light the gas?"

"Not while there is a light in the dining-room. Annie is setting the table in there. Our gas bills last quarter were enormous."

"It is doleful," complained Carrie, who was usually easily satisfied with whatever her parents decreed. "I think there is not another family in town that has such dismal, *poky* ways as ours. At Uncle Elbert's they are as gay as larks all the while. And here we sit moping

in the dark, with nothing to amuse us—on New Year's Eve, too!"

The mother had answered crossly at that with the sentence at the head of this sketch. The more pettishly because the child's repining seemed the echo of her own discontent.

Her eldest brother, Elbert Craig, had begun his business career, as had her husband, at the foot of the ladder, had mounted the lower rungs so slowly, that, when she married John Lollard, sixteen years ago, Elbert was—notwithstanding his marriage with his employer's daughter—still only head book-keeper in the establishment he had entered as clerk, eight years earlier. John had just set up a store of his own with a fair prospect of success, which was speedily overcast with the hopes of thousands of other mercantile men by a tornado panic sweeping over the country with a force and suddenness few were strong enough to withstand. Carrie, the Lollards' first-born, could just sit alone when her father gave up everything he could call his own into the hands of his creditors. He had nothing to reproach himself with. He had worked hard, invested prudently, as he believed, and lived, if comfortably, economically. His assets exactly balanced his liabilities, and there was nothing left except an unblemished name, sound health, a stout heart, and firm trust in GOD as capital for beginning the world anew. He found a place without much trouble as salesman in a wholesale dry-goods store, the proprietor of which was a personal friend who had been his chief creditor. John Lollard esteemed himself a fortunate man in securing it so soon after his failure, while hundreds were thrown out of employment for months, and many ruined beyond redemption. It was a snug berth during the storm, and would serve his purpose well enough, bring in bread and meat to his little family until he could look around him for something better.



In the fourteen years that had elapsed since then, the something better had assumed no more promising shape than a trifling rise of salary, and this he had solicited under the pressure of his increasing expenses. There were five children at home, now, three girls and two boys, and the non-elastic property of his income was more clearly and painfully appreciated each day. He often said to himself and to others that he could never have pulled through a single one of the toilsome years had not his wife been such a good manager. He ever bore about with him, although she did not know this, the recollection of her cheerful courage, her patience, her self-denial, and her encouraging counsel in the hour when their fortunes were at the lowest ebb. He could not refer, even now, without emotion to the heroic integrity that seconded his resolution to pay his honest debts if the act stripped him of the very bed he slept upon, and the tenderness that assuaged the pangs of disappointed ambition. She believed secretly, and sometimes very sadly, that he undervalued her submission to the trials that had visited them since that first great struggle as much as he had exaggerated her fortitude at that date. It was far easier to fight that battle than to endure without irritation and complaint the pinching, rubbing, and pricking of everyday life. True, he was steady in his assertion that she was a wise economist, and he never growled, as some richer men she could mention were apt to do, when she asked him for money, but, study times and seasons as she would, the application for funds would occasionally fall upon a day when there was nothing in his pocket to meet it, and she mistook his reluctance to tell her the truth for disappointment that the last supply had not lasted longer.

It is a wearisome, hateful, inexpressibly dispiriting task—the endeavor to make one dollar do the work of a dollar and a half—the futile attempt to hold the slippery representations of clothing, food, fuel, and house rent until the bills for these are all met, and there are no coming accounts to affright one into a cold sweat of agonized expectation. “Take no thought for the morrow” is a text which a vast army of anxious workers have had more difficulty in obeying than they would have known in replying to the call to persecution and death for the truth’s sake. Mrs. Lollard was conscious that she disregarded it habitually, and the knowledge that her faith was weak, herself a doubting disciple, tended to depress her still further. She ought to remember that the Father knew she had need of these things, that they who wait upon him shall want for no real good; but, in the face of these comfortable assurances, there would arise, even while she was pleading His promise upon her knees in her closet, the naked fact of present and actual necessity. There were many nights in

which she could not sleep for hours together, while those for whom she planned were locked in slumber; when she thought herself into a headache and heartache, contriving how this and that garment could be turned and altered to save the expense of a new one, or how the grocer’s or butcher’s account for the ensuing month could be cut down to match the capabilities of her housekeeping purse, or wondering how they were to get along when all the girls were grown, and the boys both old enough to go to school. Her husband and children were tempted to think her unreasonably peevish or unkind in her taciturnity on the mornings succeeding these vigils; but her heart was too heavy, her soul too sick, for the affectation of liveliness. The burden was grievous upon John’s shoulders also, as she could not but acknowledge, but he had the distraction of work with other men, and amid scenes that did not remind him incessantly of the need of more money than he possessed or was ever likely to earn.

“And there are scores of things men never see, and wouldn’t care if they did,” she said, inwardly, gloomily staring the low-spirited fire further out of countenance. “John would not have understood, for instance, how Margaret gloried in talking to me day before yesterday about her preparations for New Year’s, her girls’ dresses, and the calls she expected to receive, and all that. He would not have detected the complacent smirk with which she asked me to get out of the carriage with her at the confectioner’s, and rattled off her final orders to him; nor the patronizing tone in which she directed him to put up a package of *bonbons* for me to take home to my children. She is forever asking my advice about purchasing some article of furniture or ornament, and inquiring why I do not treat myself to the like; pushing me in the hearing of others with questions as to why I don’t send my children to dancing-school, and allow them to attend gay parties; why Carrie doesn’t take singing lessons from an Italian master, and why I never attend *matinées* and concerts. I overheard her tell John the other night that I was making an old woman of myself, staying so closely at home, and dressing so ‘demurely.’ She meant shabbily, as I knew, but he only laughed, and said he rarely noticed a lady’s dress, unless it were extremely fantastic or very slovenly, and that his wife was a model of neatness and taste in his eyes. I do dress meanly in comparison with most of my associates; never feel more dowdyish than when I am with her; she has such exquisite taste, and the means of gratifying it. Yet I like handsome clothes and a plenty of them as much as she does. It provokes me to see her rolling by in her carriage, decked out like a queen, when I have to count the cost before getting into an omnibus, and have not had a new hat or cloak in three years. It is mean and wicked, I sup-

pose, to be envious, but I wish, at least, since she is so much better off than I, that I were not obliged to see it all." She could not help despising herself heartily for the admission, but self-contempt did not make the reality of her situation more tolerable.

Margaret Craig was the only daughter of a wealthy merchant, who had condescended to allow her to ally his family with the poorer but not less respectable one represented in his establishment by his handsome and clever book-keeper. The fortune of the heiress had gone far toward raising Elbert to his present position. His wife was very fond of him, in her way, and assumed no airs of superiority on account of the assistance she had given him in his upward march. She never suspected that her sister-in-law almost hated her for the difference in their circumstances, and for what Mrs. Lollard conceived to be an ostentatious display of wealth and the advantages it bestowed upon the possessor. Mrs. Craig pitied her poor relations very sincerely. After the manner of most prosperous people she had a spice of contempt for them for not being as well-to-do as herself, but she liked and took much notice of them, nevertheless. At stated seasons—Christmas, New Year's, and birthdays, she made valuable presents to them, with good-natured liberality, if not judiciously. Mrs. Lollard did not resent her gifts of books, toys, and jewelry, but her soul arose in violent revolt against the acceptance of certain parcels of cast-off clothing, always fine in material and never much worn, which it was Mrs. Craig's pleasure to send around to the unfashionable street wherein the Lollards lived, when her own spring and fall dressmaking was done.

"I have no use for them, and where there is a house full of children such things can be worked up to advantage," she would say, carelessly, when her husband's sister tried to decline the bounty.

She had an easy, patronizing way of dealing with the dwellers in the out-of-the-way quarter that drove Mrs. Lollard to the extremest verge of decent forbearance, when she considered that the suave Lady Bountiful was, after all, only the wife of her brother. The plain truth that the Craigs were up in the world, and she and hers down, and likely to remain so, was gall and wormwood when illustrated by Margaret's "insufferable ways." It made matters no better, but rather worse that the semi-annual benefaction was so often useful.

"How well Carrie looks in that gray silk!" Mrs. Craig had said during the ride to the confectioner's that had furnished Mrs. Lollard with a pregnant text for her fireside musing. "I was so glad she happened to wear it, Wednesday evening, when we had her to dinner. You showed good taste in trimming it with russet velvet. The contrast is very fashionable just now, as I suppose you know. We

had three or four visitors in the course of the evening, and she really appeared very well—was quite the little lady. I remarked it to her uncle afterward. I should not have thrown aside the dress—I only bought it last spring—if I could have matched it. Somebody spilled a glass of wine over the front breadth the second time I ever wore it. It was too bad, for I liked it very much."

"It is a good silk," rejoined Mrs. Lollard, repressing her wounded pride by the thought that but for this gift, Carrie must have gone without any better evening dress than the purple Empress cloth her aunt had sent her at the same time.

"I never buy anything but the best fabrics, my dear!" Mrs. Craig drew her sable cloak about her with a shrug of satisfaction. "The most expensive things are invariably the cheapest in the end."

An excellent motto for those who can command money to purchase the best of everything. The poor are proverbially short-sighted. How often this defect is compulsory; how often a fault in judgment is not a question for the rich to decide. Mrs. Lollard knew as well as did her mentor that cloth at twelve dollars a yard would wear twice as long and look three times as well as a fabric that cost but six; but she had not the money for the first outlay. That settled the matter. The cheaper cloth must be bought and used all the more carefully because it would soon show signs of shabbiness.

There was no apartment in the Craig's mansion—unless it were a servant's dormitory—so plainly fitted up as was that in which Mrs. Lollard now sat. It was the living-room of the house, shut off by folding-doors from the better-furnished front parlor where a fire was seldom kindled. The carpet was faded, especially about the door and fireplace, and darned in divers spots, besides having been turned twice and made over, that the freshest breadths might be shifted to the middle of the room, and the less reputable be hidden under the lounge and in dark corners. A sewing-machine stood between the windows, with a wide-mouthed work-basket upon the top. This was never empty. One of the items in Mrs. Lollard's good management was that she always kept some piece of sewing ready to her hand—"to catch up at odd times," as she said, although where she found leisure moments, odd or even, in her round of labor and care, nobody could have guessed. The convenient bit of work was never ornamental. An apron for Emmie, a sack for Baby, a set of collars for Carrie or herself, was slipped in between the heavier tasks assigned by necessity. She had no respite from needle-work except Sundays. She had laid aside her weekly mending that afternoon only when the cloudy twilight hindered her from threading her needle. She had not a lazy bone in her body, her husband and neighbors had a



habit of affirming. She wondered, to-night, in recalling the compliment to her usefulness and energy, if the same might not be said of any galley-slave, over whose shoulders the lash continually hung. Rest was a forbidden indulgence to the poor.

Her head ached, and so did her back, and there was a dull pain in her side that would have driven a rich woman to a medical consultation. She was the physician of the family, nursing her offspring through all the maladies incident to childhood, and the milder forms of fever and catarrh which overtook them, now and then, despite their frugal fare and their mother's watchfulness. A regular practitioner had not crossed the threshold since Baby Rob's birth, two years ago. Doctors were expensive, and she was too poor to humor her uncomfortable symptoms. They would develop or disappear with time.

Poor! she always came back to that! And such unromantic, ignoble poverty as implies a constant struggle to keep one's head above water. It seemed to her, sometimes, it would be a positive relief to stop swimming and go down into actual and undeniable pauperism. She enjoyed nothing aright while incessant solicitude and activity were needful to maintain a show of respectability. And people looked down upon them. It was no secret that her husband's salary was inadequate to the demands of his growing household. When intimate friends praised her for "getting along so nicely, considering," she fancied she read pitying contempt in their eyes. Her children did not dress so well as did a majority of their playfellows, strive and strain as she might to make them appear creditably. As for herself, she was losing the taste for higher things than domestic drudgery, even while she loathed her fetters. She had no leisure for reading or music. She never saw a good picture except in a shop window, and as for attending a lecture, on art, science, biography, or travel in other lands, she put by the temptation to expend a quarter or half dollar in appeasing her intellectual craving with the reflection that it would bring greater good to the greater number if passed over to the butcher, baker, or grocer. It was a mean, unsatisfactory mode of thought and existence. Nobody could enlighten her on that point or show her the matter in a more detestable aspect than she beheld it—but whose fault was it?

She had silenced Carrie peremptorily when she had inquired why her father was not as rich as her uncle, but the question, foolish or wise, was too often uppermost in her mind nowadays. It was the Lord's will, of course. How easy it was for her lips and those of others to pronounce the formula. But why had He willed that this disparity of worldly ease should exist? Her husband—she kept herself in the background while she argued—was diligent in

business, upright in all his transactions with his fellow men; a God-fearing man, moreover, who ordered his household aright; who visited the widow and the fatherless in their affliction and kept himself unspotted from the world. If godliness were "profitable unto all things," where was its promise of good for "the life that now is?"

The children were making so much noise in the dining-room near by as to drown the tinkle of the door-bell, but the maid-of-all-work heard it in the kitchen, and admitted the visitor. He spoke before Mrs. Lollard knew he was in the house.

"Good-evening, Edith! Are you all alone?"

It was her brother Elbert, and she blushed with mortification at being discovered hovering over a smouldering fire in a dark room. Muttering something about "liking to sit in the twilight," she would have struck a match, but he stayed her hand.

"Brighten the fire a little if you like, but don't light the gas. I am sick of glare and bustle. I have been out paying New Year's calls since twelve o'clock. A tiresome, hollow sham it is, but I must keep it up until near midnight. Margaret made out my list, and I am not nearly through. Let me rest myself by a few minutes talk with you over the hearth. It looks so cosy and home-like. I wish there were as quiet a nook in my house for me to-night. Depend upon it, Edith, what we have gained in luxury we have lost in domestic comfort."

The fire, enlivened by a stick of wood and a few lumps of coal, showed her his care-lined face and the broad streaks of silver in his hair, as he sat down by her, and laid his hand upon her lap. He was not a demonstrative man by nature or habit, and the gesture touched her heart.

"Stay and spend the evening with us," she said, cheerfully. "You will not be troubled by pomps and vanities here."

"I wish I could. Pomps and vanities! That is the whole of it. The only pleasure in riches is the excitement of gathering them. When a man tires of that, he has sucked the last drop of juice out of the orange. Do you know what was the happiest moment of my life? When, at the close of my first year as sub-bookkeeper in Mr. Wallace's store, I found that I had two hundred dollars in the Savings Bank and not a debt in the world. I began forthwith to think of setting up for myself in business and offering myself to pretty Margaret Wallace, I felt so rich. I have never been half so well off since."

"But you *are* well off, whether you feel it or not," returned his sister. "Your poverty is only imaginary. When you have a contrary opinion, you know it is a fancy, the trick of diseased nerves or imperfect digestion. You need rest, not wealth."

"I have dollars and cents enough to keep

house and business going, if that is what you mean by riches. But let me relax my vigilance for a day, turn my thoughts and energies in another direction long enough to seek such recreation as my German porter enjoys during his midsummer vacation, and all may be wrecked. He takes his ease with his wife and little ones to-day; eats the Turkey I gave him yesterday with a merry heart; washes it down with a glass of lager, bought with the money I handed him as a New Year's gift; smokes a pipe to aid digestion; goes to bed at nine o'clock, and slumbers until morning, unscared by visions of insolvent debtors, falling stocks, and other dubious investments. 'The sleep of the laboring man is sweet,' we are told in Holy Writ. That means bodily, not mental labor, I am sure."

"We all have our trials and temptations, brother," interposed Mrs. Lollard, humbly, remembering her late meditations. "The lowly are not exempt from anxieties, nor, according to your showing, can money buy peace of mind."

"If it could, I should be a happier man, at home as abroad. I ought not to speak of family matters outside my own doors, I suppose, but you have been a dear, faithful sister to me always, and I have great confidence in your judgment, as in that of your husband. I want to talk with you about Wallace. I am sadly perplexed what to do with him."

"Isn't he well?"

"Well physically. In every other respect he could hardly be worse."

"Brother, you shock me! Why, he is but eighteen—a mere boy!"

"He has been gambling ever since he was fifteen," rejoined the father, in a hard tone, contradicted by the deeper lines about his mouth and eyes. "He drinks, too, I have discovered lately. I would have dealt summarily and severely with him when his iniquities first came to my knowledge, but his mother interfered. He is his grandfather's namesake, and the old gentleman unfortunately left him a fortune in his own right, of which he is to be master at twenty-one years of age. I tried to keep it a secret from him. There is no more certain way of ruining a young man than to let him know that he will not have to work for a living. But Wallace is his mother's darling, and when some inconsiderate meddler gave him a hint as to what his prospects were, he coaxed the whole story out of her. Then, she has concealed his pranks and follies; sat up for him when he was out late, and told me nothing of his debts, preferring to discharge them from her private purse; petted and nursed him when he came home half-drunk from billiard-saloon, oyster-supper, and gambling-hell. At last, his embarrassments became so heavy and complicated that they could no longer be covered from me. His bills were brought to me, his mother's store of ready money being exhausted, and his credi-

tors importunate. A family tumult was the consequence. You don't understand what that means. GOD forbid that you ever should! John and you are a unit in the government of your children, as in all things else. The boy's associates are some of the most wily and dangerous rascals in town. There is no use appealing to their sense of honor or humanity."

"Where could he have picked them up?" queried Mrs. Lollard, naïvely. "I should think your social position would have kept him above the danger of such companionship."

"A poor boy would not have attracted their cupidity. The eldest son of a man who is reputed to be wealthy, the prospective owner of a handsome fortune, is too valuable a mine to be overlooked or abandoned, now that they have hold of it. As for him, he is infatuated by them and their mode of life. My hope is that if I send him to sea on a three years' cruise, they may forget him while he is away, and the severe discipline of a sailor's life teach him something like self-mastery."

"But it is a terrible remedy." Mrs. Lollard shuddered and grew sick as she thought of her own bright, brave Johnny, whose laugh sounded from the dining-room at that instant. Could she, were he in his cousin's place, banish him from home, her guarding love, his father's companionship and example? "It is an awful experiment," she repeated, earnestly.

"So is the need of cure a fearful fact." Mr. Craig's tone was yet harder, his eyes more wretched. "Where is your husband?"

"Mr. Blakeman is sick, and he sent a note down this afternoon asking John to come to see him. He wishes to give him some directions about to-morrow's business, and there are some important letters to be answered to-day. I was a little ungracious about his going, even to oblige a sick man," coloring and stammering as she stated thus mildly the opposition she had felt and expressed to her husband's action. "John so seldom has a holiday."

"He knows what to do with it when he gets it, which is more than Blakeman does, or than I do. And he has a home in which to spend it. How merry those children are."

"They are playing rather a noisy game," said the mother, offering to rise.

"Don't stop them. It does me good to hear them. It reminds me of the days when there were children in nearly every house. My elder daughters have been in the parlor all day receiving company. Isabella and Clarence are shut up in the nursery with unlimited rations of pastry and candies to keep them quiet. By the way, that boy of yours is a manly fellow. When he and you decide what profession he is to adopt, let me know. Maybe I can give him a lift. If he should choose a mercantile life, you must let me have him. His early training has taught him the practice of such old-fashioned virtues as economy, temperance, and

honesty. He will never give you the heartache I have now."

"Things may turn out better than you expect," said Mrs. Lollard, soothingly. "You have been a kind, indulgent father, and you cannot fail of your reward."

"Reward!" He laughed slightly and scornfully. "I am only the goose that lays the golden eggs. So long as the supply lasts, I shall be treated with a reasonable show of respect. But my children do not love and cling to me as John's do to him. Your household is a joint stock company. You work together for the common good. If you have privations, they are borne for one another, and the thought is a consolation. I know how it used to be in our father's house; how we worshipped our parents, whose daily toil and sacrifices in our behalf we saw and to some extent appreciated. There was proud satisfaction in the thought that we were helping them by learning to help ourselves. My wife and I do not need our children's assistance. They live for their own pleasure, nothing else. When John was sick last winter, he was nursed as I could never hope to be, were I to be laid aside from work. There was an affectionate strife going on all the while as to who should wait upon him, and all the resources of the household were racked to furnish him with comfort and amusement. Don't talk about poverty, Edith. You do not know the meaning of the word. You are a rich woman; rich in the best of earthly blessings, rich in your faith in and hope of heaven. Good-night! Tell your husband why I wanted to see him, and say nothing about our conversation to anybody else, least of all to poor Margaret. She will have it that I am unnecessarily alarmed about our boy. The mother's heart is always ready to make excuses, you know. Good-bye, again!"

Mrs. Lollard went with him to the hall door, and stood there a minute, looking after him as he walked up the street. A hale, handsome gentleman, a casual observer would have said, with the unmistakable air of being on excellent terms with fortune. His sister thought him more to be pitied than the lamplighter in his shabby dreadnaught, who ran nimbly from one lamp-post to another whistling "Champagne Charley." She gave one glance at the clouded heavens, felt the fine, sharp mist they began to spit upon her face, and shut the door with a prayer for the sorrowing father, and a thanksgiving for the safety of her own fold.

"Children!" They were busy over a box of dissected pictures, but looked up in pleased expectancy at their mother's voice. "Papa will not be in for some time yet. Suppose we get up a little welcome for him, something to amuse us and please him. Such a good father ought to be treated with as much consideration and honor as if he were the president. And he has worked very hard for us all this year. The

Christmas tree is down in the cellar yet. John, you can cut off a quantity of small boughs, with which Carrie can make an arch for the back of papa's chair. Emmie may help her. Edie, get his dressing-gown and new slippers ready, and put a clean cover upon the footstool. I will leave the arrangement of this and the sitting-room to you while Robby and I go into the kitchen. I told Annie she could go out this evening, so we must get up our feast ourselves."

Papa was chill, weary, and damp when he put the key into the door on his return. The talk with his employer had detained him longer than he had anticipated, and he could not but feel that the sick man was inconsiderate in claiming so large a portion of his one rest day. It was past the hour for supper, and he was well enough acquainted with his wife's methodical habits to feel sure that the smallest children had eaten theirs, and were snug in bed by this time. He was sorry. He rarely saw them in the evening during the busy season except on Sundays, and he had promised himself a romp with Rob and engaged to tell Edie "lots of stories" that night, "because it was New Year's." The streets were very lively, in spite of the gathering storm. Brisk, well-dressed men brushed past him on the sidewalk, ran up and down the marble steps of stately dwellings in the eligible neighborhood, made more desirable by Mr. Blakeman's habitation. He had, through the illuminated windows of the tall blocks lining both sides of the street, glimpses of superbly-appointed parlors, and groups of elegantly-attired women receiving the compliments of the season from men as aristocratic in appearance and courteous in manner. It was a gay, pleasant scene, and nowhere fairer and more animated than in his brother-in-law's house, before which he paused for a moment. Lillian Craig, who was but a year older than his Carrie, stood in full view, dressed in pale blue silk, pearls upon her beautiful neck and arms, and white lilies in her floating hair, talking in a lively strain with a moustached youth he knew by sight as the son of a merchant prince. How lovely she looked! And yet, until now, he had thought Carrie the prettier of the two. Anita, the second daughter, was plainer than her sister or her cousin, but Mr. Lollard scarcely recognized her, would not have known her in any other house, in the amber robe that set off her dark skin, and the heavy ornaments of dead gold that reminded him of the tinkling collar and armlets of a Persian princess. She stood beside her mother, who was magnificent in garnet velvet and diamonds. His wife had not so much as a diamond ring, and her best dress was a two-year old black silk. She was a fresh beauty when he married her, and to this day a better talker and more intelligent woman than Margaret Craig, in every respect the truer lady of the

two. But nobody believed this excepting himself. The world passed the one coldly by, and bowed obsequiously to the other. He was a sensible man, not given to coveting his neighbor's goods, or questioning the dealings of his Heavenly Parent, but he sighed deeply and moved on with a heavier heart than he liked to take home.

Robby ran up to him as he opened the hall-door. Carrie had rigged him out in his best frock, a crimson merino that made him look like a bold, handsome gypsy with his great dark eyes and glowing cheeks. "Papa, we're doing to make a ting of oo."

"A king, papa," corrected Edie, also in gala-attire, while Carrie and Emmie drew off with loving violence his wet greatcoat, brought boot-jack, slippers, and warmed dressing-gown; then marshalled the procession into the dining-room, where mamma met him on the threshold with a kiss and word of welcome. The triumphal arch fastened to the back of his chair was a success, although the materials were nothing better than cedar-twigs, strings of popped-corn, and stars cut out of gilt paper stuck plentifully among the evergreens, and encircling the white medallion at the top. "DEAR PAPA" was inscribed upon this in Greek text in red and blue chalks, and this was Johnny's *chef d'œuvre*.

Mrs. Craig would have smiled indulgent disdain, her daughters giggled outright behind their hot-house bouquets at the repast, which seemed so sumptuous a banquet to the healthy, happy young Lollards—Carrie included. Hot coffee for papa and mamma—the children drank nothing but water; a plate of chipped beef flanked by another of home-made doughnuts; a glass dish of raspberry jam, balanced by a salver on which mamma constructed a marvelous pine-apple of butter, with curled parsley for the leaves at the base and apex, and in front of papa's plate smoked a gigantic plateau of buttered waffles, also of mamma's manufacture. This was the whole bill of fare with the exception of a plate of light, sweetbread. Very homely diet, you see, but a more fervent thanksgiving was not said over another meal in the land, nor did a happier party surround another board. How they ate, and talked, and laughed! praising mamma's cookery and papa's distribution of the dainties. What funny stories papa told, and how bright were the roses in mamma's dear cheeks at some things he said about New Years' days they had passed together in their youth; and what a beautiful speech Johnny made, all out of his own head, in proposing the health of the "Lord and Lady of the feast," and how cunning it was in Robby to pound the table with his fat fists and cry, "Hear!" just as Carrie had privately instructed him to do, at the conclusion of his brother's oration.

"I think we have the most goodest times of any children I know in the whole world!" pronounced Edie, climbing upon papa's left knee, Robby having usurped the right, while mamma, aided by the three elder children, made a frolic of clearing away the dishes. "It is so nice to have papa all to ourselves!"

"I am glad my darling is happy!" replied the father, kissing the curly pate nestling against his cheeks. "God is very good to us all, I think. Don't you, mamma?"

"Very good!"

He saw the quick moisture that arose to her eyes before she turned aside to conceal it, and he would not have exchanged the token of sympathy with his grateful tribute to the Giver of their mercies for the finest of Mrs. Craig's diamonds.

The wee ones had their story and a grand game of "Blind Man's Buff," to "jolt their suppers down," said Edie. Then she and her younger brother were put to bed by mamma's own hands, and tucked in as only mothers can bestow the coverings about plump shoulders and necks. They were not too sleepy to say their prayers, but their eyelids closed under her good-night kiss, and were not again lifted. The five left below stairs had a long, quiet, family talk. The children were not kept without the pale of their parent's confidence, and as a reward for the trouble it cost the latter to explain their reasons for denying them certain things, and enjoining upon them the duty of taking care of what they had, Carrie, John, and Emmie already began to spare them the pain of repeated refusals; grew daily more discreet and helpful.

"We cannot afford it just now, my dear," was a phrase that was always believed and respected, and the response was usually a brave "Never mind, mamma! I do not really need it," or a playful "Ah, well! we will wait until our ship comes in!"

"Our ship has not been telegraphed as yet," said Mr. Lollard, by and by, in allusion to the family proverb. "But I have news that a little canoe is likely to touch at our landing. Mr. Blakeman has raised my salary four hundred dollars. A hundred dollars a quarter will make things rather easier, won't it, mamma?"

"You may well say so!" she returned, and in the pure pleasure of the hour she failed to remember that Mrs. Craig had mentioned this very sum as the cost of the garnet velvet and trimmings.

"Why, we shall be rich people at this rate, after a while!" cried Carrie, to whom the amount sounded very grand.

It was the mother who answered, her head upon her husband's shoulder, and his arm around her waist, while the three children were grouped closely about them. "We are rich already, my daughter!"